

Virginia Department of Social Services' LGTBQ+ Training Evaluation: Final Report

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Abstract

In the United States, there are no federal mandates for specific programming and practices in place that specifically address foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+, even though they make up nearly 30% of the foster children population (The Williams Institute, 2019). This has contributed to foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ facing a higher risk of adverse outcomes, such as homelessness and mental health problems, as compared to their heterosexual and gender conforming counterparts. This study aims to evaluate the current training being provided by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to the child welfare workers and resource families on how competent they feel when working with youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Through surveys given to the VDSS child welfare workers and resource families, the research team gathered feedback on how well the trainings provided educate the child welfare workers and resources families on the specific needs of foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+. Study findings can then be utilized to update and improve the current trainings to better equip child welfare workers and resource families on working with foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ to reduce their risks for adverse outcomes.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ foster youth, foster carer, resource families, child welfare workers, training

Virginia Department of Social Services' LGBTQ+ Training Evaluation

Introduction

The United States foster care system has continually grown and adapted to better serve its ever-changing population of children and families being served. However, as of 2020, there is a subpopulation to the foster care children served that have minimal policies and practices in place to prepare them for success both during their time in and following their time in the foster care system. Youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+ are at an increased risk for adverse outcomes compared to their heterosexual and gender conforming peers, that range from an increased risk of aging out of the foster care system to ongoing mental health problems, like depression and self-destructive behaviors. Given that youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+ make up nearly 30% of the foster care population (The Williams Institute, 2019), those who are working with these youth need to be better trained on how to decrease the risks that youth who identify as LGBTQ+ are more likely to face as compared to their heterosexual and gender conforming counterparts.

This study evaluated the training being provided by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to child welfare workers and resource families regarding working with foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+. The first research question is: what is the effectiveness of LGBTQ+ training for child welfare workers on mitigating the risk factors associated with the intersectionality of youth identifying as LGBTQ+ in foster care? The second research question asked was: what is the effectiveness of LGBTQ+ training for resource families on mitigating the risk factors associated with the intersectionality of youth identifying as LGBTQ+ in foster care? The goal of this evaluation is to bring awareness to the needs of foster youth who identify as

LGBTQ+ and where improvements can be made in the training provided by the VDSS to address these needs for more competent child welfare workers and resource families. This research will be utilized to further guide the VDSS child welfare workers in the gaps of services being provided for foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ and how they can better provide for this population.

Literature Review

Currently, there is no federal legislation requiring child welfare agencies to ask demographic questions related to sexual orientation and gender identity expression, which has left a large gap in knowing exactly how many foster youth - those who are 13 to 21 years old - identify as LGBTQ+. Additionally, the agencies that do collect this data have a very short history of identifying patterns amongst the experiences of youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+. Within recent years it has been shown that foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ represent nearly 30% of foster care youth, which is a very disproportionate rate as compared to the LGBTQ+ population as a whole representing approximately 4.5% of the total population in the United States (Grooms, 2020; The Williams Institute, 2019; McCormick, Schmidt, & Terrazas, 2016). With that 30% of foster care youth who identify as LGBTQ+, researchers continue to find that these youth are at an increased risk for adverse outcomes as compared to their heterosexual and gender conforming peers.

These adverse outcomes are seen while foster care youth identifying as LGBTQ+ are in the foster care system and after they have left it. One adverse outcome that foster care youth identifying as LGBTQ+ are at risk of are mental health problems stemming from the interactions they have with their family, child welfare workers, resource families, and peers based on the

sexual orientation and/or gender identity expression. Many foster care youth identifying as LGBTQ+ have experienced and continue to fear rejection based on their identity, which can also lead to an internal struggle over whether they choose to disclose their identity to others or hide that part of themselves for the hope of acceptance and support from their community. For those who disclose their identity, they face an increased risk of discrimination, stigma, and victimization based on their identity that can lead to cases of abuse and/or maltreatment from their caregivers and peers (Grooms, 2020; Salazar, et al., 2019; Schofield, et al., 2019; McCormick, Scheyd, & Terrazas, 2018; Robinson, 2018; Salazar, et al., 2018). These trauma-inducing situations can lead to furthering mental health issues for these youth. They are at an increased risk of having suicidal thoughts, depression, self-harming behaviors, and engaging in risky sexual behaviors while in care and after they exit foster care (Grooms, 2020; Salazar, et al., 2019; Schofield, et al., 2019; McCormick, Scheyd, & Terrazas, 2018; Robinson, 2018; Salazar, et al., 2018; McCormick, Schmidt, & Terrazas, 2016). Even with these noted risks that foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ continue to face, support systems and resources have not been implemented by child welfare agencies to decrease their risks.

Youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+ are also more likely to age out of the foster care system - meaning they are not reunifying with their biological family and are not being adopted - which has also led to an increase in the risk of homelessness for these youth as they are leaving the system with no network of support and no knowledge or life skills to take care of themselves as an adult (Grooms, 2020; Salazar, et al., 2019; Schofield, et al., 2019; Robinson, 2018; Salazar, et al., 2018). Based on these findings, researchers have concluded that foster

youth who identify as LGBTQ+ are less likely to achieve permanency solutions as compared to their heterosexual and gender conforming counterparts.

One major reason for this problem, is that foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ are typically placed into congregate care settings, rather than foster homes; and if they are placed into foster homes, these youth tend to face placement instability as they end up having had several resource family placements by the time they leave the foster care system (Grooms, 2020; Salazar, et al., 2019; Schofield, et al., 2019; McCormick, Scheyd, & Terrazas, 2018; Salazar, et al., 2018; McCormick, Schmidt, & Terrazas, 2016). Structural Family theory and Attachment theory explain that a placement with an accepting and supportive resource family is important for children and youth within the foster care system, as it tends to create the least restrictive setting thus improving outcomes for these youth. Resource families help these children overcome the trauma they have faced and develop the appropriate social and personal skills needed to thrive in adulthood. Specifically for foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+, when placed with a resource family who is accepting and supportive of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity expression, they can learn from their resource parents, who become advocates for them, how to unconditionally accept themselves while also developing the coping skills to face stigma from society.

VDSS Child Welfare First Hand Account

The study interviewed child welfare workers with the Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Department of Social Services (CCHDSS) to hear directly how well they felt child welfare workers were prepared in serving foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ and how well they thought resource families were prepared to house and parent these youth. Currently in Virginia,

there is no mandate for the VDSS to provide training on the specific needs of youth who identify as LGBTQ+, which has left child welfare workers and resource families with very limited training on this population. Child welfare workers reported that they did not feel that they or resource families were well prepared in serving these youth; many of the child welfare workers have had to learn on the job from the youth they work with about the specific needs they face, but continue to see a severe lack in resources for both the child welfare workers and resource families. This interview led us to developing the conceptual framework (Appendix F) that showcases how this lack in training to educate child welfare workers and resource families on the needs of foster youth who identify as LGBTQ+ only contributes to the increased risk for adverse outcomes that research has shown these youth are facing while in the foster care system and after they leave the system.

Methodology

Research Aim, Hypothesis, & Design

In order to mitigate the possible risk factors associated with the intersectionality of youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+, it is essential to equip both child welfare workers and resource parents with practical skills on working with and engaging with these youths. As such, the purpose of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the training specific to engaging with and working with youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+ provided by the VDSS for both child welfare workers employed by the agency and resource parents approved by the agency.

The study employed a non-experimental process evaluation/exploratory study, measuring the perception of competency from both local child welfare workers and resource parents in the state of Virginia in working with and engaging with youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+ based on the training they received by the state. A combined process evaluation and exploratory study design was identified as the most appropriate evaluation for this research due to the study's overall goal of measuring perceived LGBTQ+ youth engagement ability efficacy based on the current training utilized by the state.

The two primary research questions are as follows: 1) What is the effectiveness of LGBTQ+ training for child welfare workers on mitigating the risk factors associated with the intersectionality of youth identifying as LGBTQ+ in foster care? 2) What is the effectiveness of LGBTQ+ training for resource parents on mitigating the risk factors associated with the intersectionality of youth identifying as LGBTQ+ in foster care? Due to the qualitatively descriptive nature of the study's design, the study does not have a formal hypothesis for the two research questions noted above; however, based on some anecdotal evidence collected from a team of child welfare workers at a local department of social services (LDSS), it is the belief of the study that the current LGBTQ+ training provided by the VDSS to both child welfare workers and resource parents is inadequate, thus not equipping workers and resource parents to adequately engage and work with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ in foster care, subsequently producing a greater risk for negative outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

The potential lack of training implemented by the VDSS specific to working with and engaging with youth in foster care that identify as LGBTQ+, negatively affects the competencies and abilities of child welfare workers at various localities to effectively engage with these youths. Similarly, this potential lack of training provided and offered to resource parents negatively affects their abilities to effectively care for the youth. This is also compounded by the perceived lack of foster parent engagement from the various locality welfare workers. This lack of training for both parties trickles down to the youth in foster care identifying as LGBTQ+, thereby affecting the youths' engagement with workers and resource parents, thereby reinforcing the already existent risk factors which subsequently produce negative outcomes such as an increased likelihood of developing mental health issues, experiencing homelessness/housing security, substance use, unsafe/harmful sexual practices for the youth. This is visually detailed in Appendix F.

Sampling Strategy & Data Collection

Sampling Strategy

The populations of interest include child welfare workers and resource parents across the United States of America. For the purposes of this study the samples of interest include the child welfare workers employed by the VDSS and the resource parents approved by the VDSS. Utilizing a purposive sampling strategy, we strategically recruited study participants through collaboration with Naomi Reddish, Virginia Commonwealth University's Child Welfare Stipend Program Coordinator. Reddish forwarded this survey to the entire network of coordinators in the

state of Virginia with the intention of those coordinators forwarding it to all of their child welfare stipend program recipients, all of whom are mandated to be interning at an LDSS in the state of Virginia per the stipulations of their stipend contracts. It was the study's hope that these intern workers would be able to take this survey as well as forward this survey to their local child welfare workers whom they are learning from and working with. Similarly, each LDSS has a list of resource parents whom they utilize for their youth in foster care. It was the study's hope that the same stipend recipient students would also be able to forward the survey to their local family services supervisor who can then forward the survey to the resource parents in that locality. The study aimed to have approximately 100 respondents from various local child welfare workers across the state and approximately 25 respondents from local resource parents across the state.

Data Collection

The study utilized two online self administered surveys powered through Survey Monkey to collect data from respondents. An online survey was identified as the most appropriate medium in which to collect data due to a variety of factors including: a) the feasibility of completing an online survey better increasing the study's chances of adequate sample size recruitment, b) the privacy in completing an online survey better protecting the study participants' confidentiality, and c) the safety of completing an online survey amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

Survey Questions

Both research questions have their own set of surveys, each with a total of 6 questions which are comprised of some multiple-choice validation questions, two Likert scale questions, and one short answer question. A copy of the noted survey questions can be viewed in Appendix A.

Informed Consent Statement. As mentioned above, both surveys were generated through Survey Monkey, which is a secure platform that securely stores respondent data on its servers and has its own privacy and usage terms of agreement. Additionally, the study created a statement of consent discussing voluntary participation, benefits, risks, confidentiality, and contact information for both the student researchers and the VDSS IRB who is the approving body of this research, as seen in Appendix B. Prior to commencing the survey, respondents were prompted to read over these terms of agreement and asked to digitally verify that they understand and consent to taking place in the study through their anonymous survey responses. A copy of the informed consent statement that will be included in the online surveys can be viewed in Appendix B.

Survey One – Child Welfare Workers. As noted above, Survey one asked: 1) Do you currently work for a Local Department of Social Services in the state of Virginia in a child welfare serving capacity (i.e. foster care, foster care prevention, public adoption, etc.)? 2) Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, or simply as non-heterosexual and/or

non-cisgender?) 3) Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas? 4) On a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 10 representing the most prepared. 5) On a scale of 1-5 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 10 representing the most competent? 6) What are some areas that you believe you could benefit from knowing more about regarding how to best work/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+?

Survey Two – Resource Parents. Survey two asked: 1) Do you currently serve as a resource/foster parent in the state of Virginia? 2) Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, or simply as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender?) 3) Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas? 4) On a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 10 representing the most prepared. 5) On a scale of 1-5 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all

and 10 representing the most competent? 6) What are some areas that you believe you could benefit from knowing more about regarding how to best work/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+?

Variables

Due to having two primary research questions, the study has two sets of both independent and dependent variables. It should be noted that due to the non-experimental research design being employed by the study, there are no control variables for either of the research questions.

Research Question One Operationalized Variables – Child Welfare Workers

The dependent variable for research question one is the engagement ability of the local child welfare workers, being the competency/perceived ability of child welfare workers employed by the VDSS to effectively engage with youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+. The independent variable for research question one is the training provided by the VDSS specific to working with youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+.

Research Question Two Operationalized Variables – Resource Parents

The dependent variable for research question two is the engagement ability of the local resource parents, being the competency/perceived ability of resource parents approved by the VDSS to effectively engage with youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+. The independent variable for research question two is the training provided by the VDSS specific to working with youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+.

Data Analysis Strategy

After collecting the data from Survey Monkey, it was securely transcribed into a data set and stored on a password protected computer. The data was then uploaded into SPSS in order to run descriptive statistics and bivariate analyses. The study then analyzed the short answer questions and transcribed that data into an excel spreadsheet and once again stored it on a password protected computer.

Ethical Issues

As noted, the study utilized Survey Monkey to implement both surveys. Survey Monkey stored all of the data in a secure fashion on their servers and the survey was not set up to collect identifiable information including names, email addresses, or traceable IP addresses.

Additionally, survey participants were required to review the letter of informed consent produced by the research team as well as the privacy and usage terms set forth by Survey Monkey outlining their rights and informing them how their data will be used. To protect the identity and privacy of all participants, the survey data was kept on password-protected computers once the study's recruitment/survey phase closed. The raw data obtained from the surveys was not shared with anyone outside of the research team. Findings and final reports have been made available to all participants and involved institutions by request.

Validity

Potential Strengths

In addition to recognizing the limitations of the study it should be noted that the study does have moderate strengths in regard to validity. In terms of measurement validity, the study

asks the question of perceived competency in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ in very similar language between the two surveys/samples. This will boost measurement validity by ensuring the question is asking what it is meant to be asking. Similarly, the study believes that due to surveying multiple different localities across the state that this will increase the generalizability and thus the external validity of the study.

Potential Limitations

Threats to internal validity could be found in the confounding variables of the study which could include: the participants being in a negative mood while taking the survey, not understanding the study's definition of training, or not understanding the study's definition of engagement. Threats to external validity could be founded in utilizing the Child Welfare Stipend Network as a means to recruit participants for the study which has the potential of isolating the results to a handful of localities thus deprecating the generalizability of the study.

Results

Child Welfare Workers

The study collected data from twenty four child welfare workers across the state of Virginia (n=24).

Quantitative

Question one asked respondents the following: Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+? 20.8% responded yes, 37.5% responded no,

and 41.7% responded other implying that they received training outside of/not sponsored by VDSS. Question two asked respondents the following: Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas? 5% of respondents answered yes, 85.5% of respondents answered no, and 10% were unsure. Question three asked respondents the following: On a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 5 representing the most prepared? 41.7% responded with a level one, 20.8% responded with a level two, 8.3% responded with a level three, 20.8% responded with a level four, and 8.3% responded with a level 5. Question four asked respondents the following: On a scale of 1-5 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 5 representing the most competent? 12.5% responded with a level one, 8.3% responded with a level two, 25% responded with a level three, 41.7% responded with a level four, and 12.5% responded with a level five.

Qualitative

Question five asked the following: What are some areas that you believe you could benefit from knowing more about regarding how to best work/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+? Out of the 17 short answer responses, the majority of responses were geared towards how to engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ in foster care, and how to help resource and biological families engage with their children. Seven of the responses addressed the current lack of training, or at least specific training towards this population, for both workers and resource families. Workers were the only group to note wanting to learn more about policy - current

legislation and human rights. Two notable quotes include the following: 1) “There is a scary low level of awareness and training on the subject of LGBTQ persons. I also feel the foster parent recruitment and training needs an intensive examination of LGBTQ sensitivity, trauma, and training.”; 2) “Right now these children are mentioned in passing when we are in trainings, but we do not have trainings about their unique needs... How do we prepare resource families for the unique emotional challenges experienced by these children and teens.”

Spearman Rho Analysis

Using the child welfare worker data set, the researchers asked whether there was a statistically significant relationship between respondents perception of training preparedness and respondents perception of personal competency regarding working and engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+. The null hypothesis stated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between perceived training preparedness and perceived level of competence. The alternative hypothesis stated that there was a statistically significant association between perceived training preparedness and perceived level of competence. The independent variable was perceived training preparedness and the dependent variable was perceived level of competence.

Assumption Check. The analysis used the ordinal data received from questions three and four on the child welfare worker dataset thus meeting the requirements to perform a Spearman Rho correlation.

Spearman Rho Results. The performed analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between respondents perception of training preparedness and respondents perception of personal competency regarding working and engaging with youth

identifying as LGBTQ+ at the 0.01 significance/alpha level ($r_s=.543$, $p=.006$). This output can be viewed in a table in Appendix H. The study accepts the alternative hypothesis. The research team recognizes that a variety of factors could have also contributed to the significance level identified in the spearman rho correlation in addition and/or aside from the noted respondent perception.

Resource Families

The study collected data from twenty seven child resource families across the state of Virginia (n=27).

Quantitative

Question one asked respondents the following: Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+? 40.7% of respondents answered yes, 40.7% answered no, and 18.5% answered other, implying that they received training outside of/not sponsored by the VDSS. Question two asked respondents the following: Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas? 26.7% of respondents answered yes, 46.7% of respondents answered no, and 26.7% were unsure. Question three asked respondents the following: On a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 5 representing the most prepared? 40.7% of respondents responded with a level one, 11.1% responded with a level two, 22.2% responded with a level three, 7.4% responded with a level four, and 18.5% responded with a level five. Question four asked respondents the following: On a scale of 1-5 how competent do you personally feel in

working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 5 representing the most competent? 22.2% of respondents responded with a level one, 7.4% responded with a level two, 11.1% responded with a level three, 37% responded with a level four, and 22.2% responded with a level five.

Qualitative

Question five asked the following: What are some areas that you believe you could benefit from knowing more about regarding how to best work/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+? Out of the 10 short answer responses, half involved requests for community resources, which included hearing examples or personal experiences from those who identify as LGBTQ+; about half of the responses also included learning more on the terminology and proper pronoun usage. The third largest response was geared towards developmental impacts, such as navigating the public school system with a child who identifies as LGBTQ+, and the emotional, physical, and mental impacts that those who identify as LGBTQ+ can have while in foster care.

Spearman Rho Analysis

Using the resource family data set, the researchers asked whether there was a statistically significant relationship between respondents perception of training preparedness and respondents perception of personal competency regarding working and engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+. The null hypothesis stated that there was not a statistically significant relationship between perceived training preparedness and perceived level of competence. The alternative hypothesis stated that there was a statistically significant association between perceived training preparedness and perceived level of competence. The independent variable was perceived training preparedness and the dependent variable was perceived level of competence.

Assumption Check. The analysis used the ordinal data received from questions three and four on the child welfare worker dataset thus meeting the requirements to perform a Spearman Rho correlation.

Spearman Rho Results. The performed analysis indicated that there was a statistically significant relationship between respondents perception of training preparedness and respondents perception of personal competency regarding working and engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ at the 0.01 significance/alpha level ($r_s=.631$, $p= <.001$). This output can be viewed in a table in Appendix I. The study accepts the alternative hypothesis. The research team recognizes that a variety of factors could have also contributed to the significance level identified in the spearman rho correlation in addition and/or aside from the noted respondent perception.

Discussion and Implications

The analysis of child welfare workers and foster/resource family survey responses illustrated how competent and confident they feel in engaging with and working with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ based on the training they had received from VDSS. The majority of respondents from both surveys did not identify the training provided by the VDSS as being specific to the LGBTQ+ population - meaning that the information being provided on the LGBTQ+ population was combined in a training with other topics. Many of the respondents also answered that they had attended training on the LGBTQ+ population outside of and not directly sponsored by the VDSS, which showcases that there is currently a need not being met by the VDSS when it comes to training on youth who identify as LGBTQ+. When a Spearman Rho correlation was conducted, it showed that respondents' perceptions of training on the LGBTQ+

population could be associated with impacting the respondents' perceptions of their own competency in working with youth who identify as LGBTQ+. From the responses towards the final qualitative question in the surveys, there were varying interests amongst the child welfare workers as compared to the foster/resource families. The latter reported more interest in learning about the LGBTQ+ community - their experiences and proper terminology use - along with the impact that their disclosure of being LGBTQ+ has on them emotionally, mentally, and developmentally; whereas, the child welfare workers reported more interest in learning specific techniques on relational building with the youth for themselves and for the families engaging with the youth. The child welfare workers were also the group that highlighted the current lack of training the most.

There were some limitations of this study. In particular, given the anonymity to this survey, the amount of responses being received by each county could not be tracked. This meant that we could not follow up with specific counties to ensure we were receiving a good variety of responses from across Virginia; had we been able to, our results could have been even more generalizable for the state of Virginia. Additionally, there were two errors in the dissemination of the surveys used. First, for the two scale questions asked in both surveys, there was an error in writing it, so it ended up having a scale of 1 to 100 instead of 1 to 5. This left a variety of answers that had to be re-coded correctly after the surveys were received. There were also two responses to the foster/resource family survey where the respondents marked that they were not current foster/resource families, but continue to answer the survey. These survey responses had to be removed from the data. Another important limitation to note is the nature of self-reporting within the surveys regarding understanding and competence. It is significantly possible that

unidentified biases impacted the quality of responses given in how confident individuals feel with engaging and working with youth who identify as LGBTQ+. This could have then unintentionally caused an inaccurate response in how effective training is or on what individuals need to learn more about when working with youth who identify as LGBTQ+.

This study has begun the process of giving greater examination to the current training and practices being exhibited by VDSS when it comes to working with and engaging with youth who identify as LGBTQ+. There is still much more to be researched, including how specific counties train their employees and families on working with this population, what specific practices are being utilized to ensure these youth are supported in the disclosure of their SOGIE, and what are the current experiences of youth who identify as LGBTQ+ in the foster care system. The only way to continue providing the best services and outcomes for this population is to do the research and be informed on their experiences and needs as they move through the system.

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Appendices

- Appendix A: Questionnaire/Evaluation Instrument for Research**
- Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**
- Appendix C: Timeline for Key Project Tasks and Individual Responsibilities**
- Appendix D: Project Support Letters**
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Appendix A: Questionnaire/Evaluation Instrument for Research

LDSS Child Welfare Worker Questions

1. Do you currently work for a Local Department of Social Services in the state of Virginia in a child welfare serving capacity (i.e. foster care, foster care prevention, public adoption, etc.)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, or simply as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender?)
 - a. Yes, I received training regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ from the Virginia Department of Social Services
 - b. No, I did NOT receive training regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ from the Virginia Department of Social Services
 - c. I received training regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, but it was not given by the Virginia Department of Social Services
3. Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas?
 - a. The training was specifically pertaining to working with/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+.
 - b. The training was NOT specifically pertaining to working with/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+.
 - c. I am unsure if the training was specifically pertaining to working with/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+.
4. On a scale of 1-10, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 10 representing the most prepared.
 - a. 1,2,3,4,5
5. On a scale of 1-10 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 10 representing the most competent?
 - a. 1,2,3,4,5
6. What are some areas that you believe you could benefit from knowing more about regarding how to best work/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+?
 - a. Short Answer

Resource Parent Questions

1. Do you currently serve as a resource/foster parent in the state of Virginia?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, or simply as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender?)
 - a. Yes, I received training regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ from the Virginia Department of Social Services
 - b. No, I did NOT receive training regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ from the Virginia Department of Social Services
 - c. I received training regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, but it was not given by the Virginia Department of Social Services
3. Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas?
 - a. The training was specifically pertaining to working with/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+.
 - b. The training was NOT specifically pertaining to working with/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+.
 - c. I am unsure if the training was specifically pertaining to working with/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+
4. On a scale of 1-10, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 10 representing the most prepared.
 - a. 1,2,3,4,5
5. On a scale of 1-10 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 10 representing the most competent?
 - a. 1,2,3,4,5
6. What are some areas that you believe you could benefit from knowing more about regarding how to best work/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+?
 - a. Short Answer

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey measuring the perceived effectiveness of working with and engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ based on the training you did or did not receive by the Virginia Department of Social Services. This is a research project being conducted by John Ruane and Mikaela Doench, student researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University. It should take approximately 7 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about how to improve training regarding effective strategies on working with and engaging with youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ+.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers will be sent to a link at SurveyMonkey.com where data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. Survey Monkey does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Your anonymous raw data will only be shared with the following parties: Researcher John Ruane, Researcher Mikaela Doench, and the Virginia Department of Social Services upon request.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the research team members John Ruane at john.ruane@dss.virginia.gov or Mikaela Doench at doenchm@chesterfield.gov.

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or that your rights as a participant in research have not been honored during the course of this project, or you have any questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, you may contact the Virginia Department of Social Services Institutional Review Board at 801 E. Main Street Richmond, VA 23219, or email irb@dss.virginia.gov

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

Agree

Disagree

Appendix C: Timeline for Key Project Tasks and Individual Responsibilities

Due Date	Task	Researcher in Charge
Mid-December 2020	Receive IRB approval from VDSS	John and Mikaela
January 2021	Meet with Naomi Reddish to present our survey that will be sent out via the Child Welfare Stipend network	John
Late January 2021	Begin to send out survey to potential participants through the Child Welfare Stipend Network	John and Mikaela
Early March 2021	Send out survey for last push of collecting participant's responses	John and Mikaela
Mid-March 2021	Close survey; gather all responses from survey	John and Mikaela
Late March 2021	Begin data analysis	John and Mikaela
Late April/Early May 2021	Complete the final paper	John and Mikaela

Appendix D: IRB & Project Support Letter

DATE: January 5, 2021

TO: John Ruane, VCU MSW Candidate Mikaela Doench, VDU MSW Candidate

FROM: Eleanor Brown, MSW, MPH, PhD

Senior Research Associate and IRB Chair

RE: VDSS IRB # 2021-01

Title: Virginia Department of Social Services' LGBTQ+ Training Evaluation

STUDY SUMMARY:

For the purposes of this study, the samples of interest include child welfare workers employed by the VDSS and resource parents approved by the VDSS. In order to acquire a robust sample size, the study intends on utilizing a purposive sampling strategy in which the research team will strategically recruit participants for the study through collaboration with Virginia's Child Welfare Stipend Program Network. Similarly, each LDSS has a list of resource parents whom they utilize for their youth in foster care. It is the hope of the study that the same stipend recipient students will also be able to forward the survey to their local family services supervisor who can then forward the survey to the resource parents in that locality. The study aims to have approximately 100 respondents from various local child welfare workers across the state and approximately 25 respondents from local resource parents across the state.

The study intends on utilizing an online survey powered through Survey Monkey to collect data from respondents. Both research questions have their own set of surveys, each with six questions that are

comprised of some multiple-choice validation questions, two Likert scale questions, and one short answer question. A copy of the noted survey questions can be viewed in the Research Protocol. Once the data is collected from Survey Monkey, it will be securely transcribed into a data set and stored on a password-protected computer. The data will then be uploaded into SPSS in order to run descriptive statistics. The research team will then analyze the short answer questions and transcribe that data into an excel spreadsheet and once again stored on a password protected computer. These results will then be disseminated in the final research results write-up.

VDSS ROLE: While no specific tasks are identified for the VDSS Coordinator of the Virginia Child Welfare Stipend Program, it is understood that this individual will be kept informed of the study's progress along with the VCU Program Coordinator.

IRB APPROVAL: The VDSS IRB operates under the regulatory authorities as described within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Title 45 CFR 46, Subparts A, B, C, and D and related guidance documents; the Commonwealth of Virginia Code of Virginia 32.1, Chapter 5.1 Human Research; and the Commonwealth of Virginia Administrative Code Title 22. Social Services, 22VAC40-890 et seq.

801 East Main Street · Richmond VA · 23219-2901 <http://www.dss.virginia.gov> · 804-726-7000 · TDD 800-828-1120

Ruane; Doench January 5, 2021 Page 2 of 2

On January 5, 2021, the VDSS IRB approved the above referenced study by expedited review. The study poses no more than minimal risk to study participants and an expedited review, by the IRB Chair and one other member of the IRB was deemed appropriate for this study. Approval is effective as of January 6, 2021 and expires on January 5, 2022. This approval includes the following items reviewed:

1. Request for Initial Review signed 12/11/2020
2. Study Protocol dated 12/11/2021
3. PI and Co-PI Curriculum Vita(s) or Resume(s)
4. Consent documents (contained in Study Protocol)
5. Scripts and/or survey questions (Study Protocol)
6. Recruitment process/materials (Study Protocol and Letter of Support from Naomi Reddish, VCU, 12/8/2020)

Conditions: This approval applies to any research conducted or authorized by the Virginia Department of Social Services, any Agency or Facility Licensed by the Department, Local Departments of Social Services, any VDSS contractor, or other interested parties. In order to comply with federal and state regulations, and the terms of this approval, the investigator must:

Conduct the research as described in and required by the Protocol.

Obtain prior approval from the VDSS IRB before implementing any changes.

Monitor all problems (anticipated and unanticipated) associated with risk to research participants or others.

Report Unanticipated Problems (UPs), including protocol deviations.

Obtain prior approval from the VDSS IRB before use of any advertisement or other material, not described in

the Protocol and review here, for recruitment of research participants.

Promptly report and/or respond to all inquiries by the VDSS IRB concerning the conduct of the approved

research when so requested.

Promptly report and/or respond to all inquiries by the VDSS contract administrator concerning the conduct

of the approved research when so requested.

Modifications: Any modification to the protocol, instruments, or designation of PI requires VDSS IRB review prior to implementing such change by submitting the “Modification to Approved Study”, which is located on the IRB web page page <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/about/irb.cgi>

Study Completion: As required by Virginia legislative mandate (§32.1-162.19), results of completed studies must be summarized in the IRB annual report and made available to the public on the IRB Internet web site. Please provide an abstract documenting the findings from the study as soon as practicable and in addition, submit the “Study Close-Out Report” also found on the VDSS IRB web page <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/about/irb.cgi>



Chesterfield-Colonial Heights
Department of Social Services

P.O. Box 430
Chesterfield, Virginia 23832
Telephone: 804/748-1100
Fax: 804/717-6294

November 25, 2020

Dear Mikaela Doench:

This letter serves as confirmation that the Chesterfield-Colonial Heights Department of Social Services approves your research project as part of your MSW program at Virginia Commonwealth University. The Department grants you permission to study the following research question: What is the effectiveness of LGBTQ+ training for child welfare workers and resource families on mitigating the risk factors associated with the intersectionality of youth identifying as LGBTQ+ in foster care?

During your research, you can survey and/or interview child welfare workers and resource families as well as utilize non-identifiable demographic data regarding youth who identify as LGBTQ+, resource families and child welfare workers.

We look forward to reviewing your findings as we strive to improve outcomes for our youth in foster care. Thank you for your interest in exploring this important topic.

Sincerely,

Danika Briggs, LCSW
Assistant Director for Family Services

Appendix E: CITI Exam Certificates



Completion Date 13-Apr-2020
Expiration Date 13-Apr-2022
Record ID 36261333

This is to certify that:

Mikaela Doench

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Basic/Refresher Course Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
Social and Behavioral (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

Under requirements set by:

Virginia Commonwealth University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wef0e4963-d2bd-4a90-837a-82c5513adad1-36261333



Completion Date 03-Jun-2020
Expiration Date 03-Jun-2022
Record ID 36880458

This is to certify that:

John Ruane

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Basic/Refresher Course Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
Social and Behavioral (Course Learner Group)
2 - Refresher Course (Stage)

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME. Do not use for TransCelerate mutual recognition (see Completion Report).

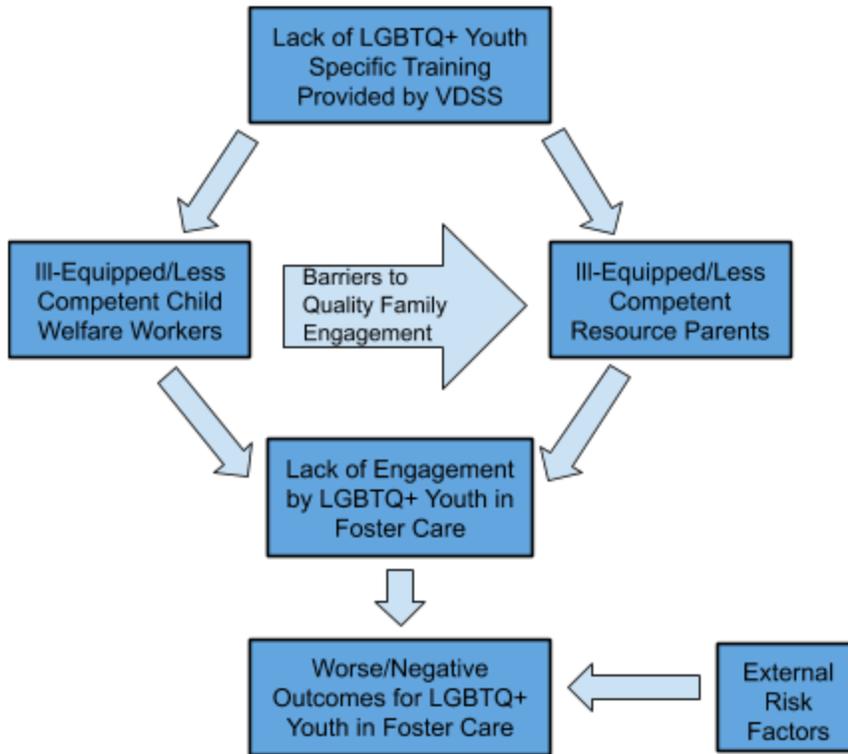
Under requirements set by:

Virginia Commonwealth University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w1ee0ff49-4a7e-4619-a384-1a011e8ffbe7-36880458

Appendix F: Conceptual Framework Visual



Appendix G: Code Books

Worker

Variable	Label	Type	Value	Survey Question
ID	Case ID	Nominal	Numeric Value Starting From 1	N/A
CW	Currently Work LDSS	Nominal	0=Yes, 1= No	1: Do you currently work for a Local Department of Social Services in the state of Virginia in a child welfare serving capacity (i.e. foster care, foster care prevention, permanency, etc.)?
Training	Received LGBTQ+ Training	Nominal	0= Yes, 1= No, 2=Other	2: Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, or simply as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender?)
Specific Training	Training Specific To LGBTQ+	Nominal	0= Yes, 1= No, 2= Unsure	3: Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas?
TP	Training Preparedness	Ordinal	Numeric Value: 1-5	4: On a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 5 representing the most prepared.
PP	Personal Preparedness	Ordinal	Numeric Value: 1-5	5: On a scale of 1-5 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 5 representing the most competent based on the training you received by the state?
MI	More Info	Qualitative	Qualitative	6: What are some areas that you believe you could benefit from knowing more about regarding how to best work/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+?

Resource Family

Variable	Label	Type	Value	Survey Question
ID	Case ID	Nominal	Numeric Value Starting From 1	N/A
CS	Currently Serve As F/R Parent	Nominal	0= Yes, 1= No	1:Do you currently serve as a resource/foster parent in the state of Virginia?
Training	Received LGBTQ+ Training	Nominal	0= Yes, 1= No, 2=Other	2: Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, or simply as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender?)
Specific Training	Training Specific To LGBTQ+	Nominal	0= Yes, 1= No, 2= Unsure	3:Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas?
TP	Training Preparedness	Ordinal	Numeric Value: 1-5	4:On a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 5 representing the most prepared.
PP	Personal Preparedness	Ordinal	Numeric Value: 1-5	5:On a scale of 1-5 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 5 representing the most competent?
MI	More Info	Qualitative	Qualitative	6:What are some areas that you believe you could benefit from knowing more about regarding how to best work/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+?

Appendix H: Child Welfare Worker Spearman Rho Output

Correlations

			Training_Sacle	Personal_Scale
Spearman's rho	Training_Sacle	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.543**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.006
		N	24	24
	Personal_Scale	Correlation Coefficient	.543**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.
		N	24	24

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix I: Resource Family Spearman Rho Output**Correlations**

			EfficacyScale	PersonalScale
Spearman's rho	EfficacyScale	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.631**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	<.001
		N	27	27
	PersonalScale	Correlation Coefficient	.631**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.
		N	27	27

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Appendix J: Quantitative Results Table Format

Quantitative Results - WORKERS

- Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+
 - NO = 37.5%
 - YES = 20.8%
 - OTHER (Outside of/Not Sponsored by VDSS = 41.7%
- Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas?
 - 85.5% = NO
 - 5% = YES
 - 10% = UNSURE
- On a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 5 representing the most prepared?
 - 1 = 41.7%
 - 2 = 20.8%
 - 3 = 8.3%
 - 4 = 20.8%
 - 5 = 8.3%
- On a scale of 1-5 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 5 representing the most competent?
 - 1 = 12.5%
 - 2 = 8.3%
 - 3 = 25%
 - 4 = 41.7%
 - 5 = 12.5%

Quantitative Results - RESOURCE FAMILIES

- Have you at any point received training from the Virginia Department of Social Services, in any capacity, regarding how to best work with/engage with youth identifying as LGBTQ+?
 - NO = 40.7%
 - YES = 40.7%
 - OTHER (Outside of/Not Sponsored By VDSS) = 18.5%
- Was the training you received from the Virginia Department of Social Services specifically regarding working with youth identifying as LGBTQ+, or was the training in combination with other topical training areas?
 - NO = 46.7%
 - YES = 26.7%
 - UNSURE = 26.7%
- On a scale of 1-5, how well do you feel this training prepared you to effectively work/engage with youth who identify as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not at all and 5 representing the most prepared?
 - 1 = 40.7%
 - 2 = 11.1%
 - 3 = 22.2%
 - 4 = 7.4%
 - 5 = 18.5%
- On a scale of 1-5 how competent do you personally feel in working/engaging with youth identifying as LGBTQ+ with 1 representing not competent at all and 5 representing the most competent?
 - 1 = 22.2%
 - 2 = 7.4%
 - 3 = 11.1%
 - 4 = 37%
 - 5 = 22.2%